

The University of Chicago

THE IDEA OF SALVATION AS
MODIFIED BY THE IDEA OF GOD IN
A SCIENTIFIC WORLD VIEW

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

1931

By

MORGAN SAMUEL ODELL

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1935

The University of Chicago

THE IDEA OF SALVATION AS
MODIFIED BY THE IDEA OF GOD IN
A SCIENTIFIC WORLD VIEW

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

1931

By
MORGAN SAMUEL ODELL

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1935



CHAPTER V

SALVATION IN A SCIENTIFIC AGE

The present study of the Christian message of salvation has centered about the problem of reconstruction raised by the following questions: What fundamental human convictions of need and satisfaction does the message of salvation stress? What are the characteristics of the doctrine of salvation which have tended to make it inadequate for the satisfaction of human need in a scientific age? What reconstruction of the message is possible which will make it effective for this age?

Our study has indicated the influence which the accepted idea of God has had on the formulation of the message and technique of salvation. The idea of God has passed through the patterns of the Imperial Will, the Spiritual Substance, the Imperial Will, etc., the expressions of the Christian group has measurably as the Christian group has understandable and effective in the Constant change of emphasis upon the elements of salvation has been one of the of the Christian message. New meanings and practices of worship and ritual have been given to traditional beliefs. These have been within the limits of that upon the rather literal acceptance of the authoritative scriptures.

The theological message of the orthodox message of salvation has been formed on the idea of God as a divine sovereign possessed of supernatural and superhuman attributes. The relations of the individual to God have been analogous to those of a subject to his ruler. This relationship and the ultimate blessings to flow from it have been set in an ideal spiritual existence, far superior to this hindering evil world. The technique of relationship to God thus acquired a dual stress; relationship to a supernatural, spiritual being who was also Ruler of the Universe, possessing many of the characteristics of human sovereigns. The attempt to make God vitally effective in the experience of men thus resulted in these temporal emphases of the doctrine of salvation which arose out of the use of social patterns

of explanation as descriptive of the real nature of God. Dean Mathews once described Christian theology as a sort of transcendentalized politics.¹

However, there was discovered underneath these once effective analogies, a number of persistent human quests for the satisfaction of the pressing needs of life. These human drives have made use of the inherited religious control of the seemingly overwhelming environment as the most certain and dependable means for the attainment of these needs. An analysis of these demands for satisfaction disclosed two principles of classification, the more general division into the physical, spiritual, and social needs of human life; and a more psychological analysis of the search for guarantees of human satisfactions. This search was found to include the desires for security, peace with the divine power, personal significance, newness of life, and certainty in the knowledge of the ways of God and salvation.

A study of the ideas of God advanced by those present-day philosophers who seem most aware of the meaning and inference of scientific method and knowledge for human life, indicate that the idea of God in a scientific world view is radically different from the supernatural and anthropomorphic concepts of historical Christianity around which the message of salvation has been built. That power in the universe upon which man is dependent for life and its enrichment was found to be describable as that process of progressive integration in nature which has created and now continues to create those structures possessing qualities of value. The factors inherent in this organization of value may be known through observation and tested inference. Knowledge of God is to be gained through rational experimental method. A summation of the characteristics of God so conceived indicates that God is that existent and possible order or process of interaction in the cosmos which is creative of structures of value. God is not a disembodied spirit or form external to physical nature; nor is God, as only one order in the universe, omnipotent; nor is God limited only to the actual, God is also the order of possible values; nor is God a super-person. In the experience of the human group God is that order of social integration which results in communal satisfactions.

¹ Cf. The Atonement and the Social Process (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), p. 33.

Salvation as Intelligent Personal Development
in Physical and Social Adjustment

When God is thought of as a natural process of integration, it becomes evident that the practices of religion, based upon a concept of God as a supernatural sovereign, are no longer effective for the establishment of those relationships with the cosmic power which result in the highest satisfaction of the needs of man. The technique of salvation becomes that of intelligent personal adjustment to the physical, biological, psychological, and sociological elements of the environment so that there is realized that integrated structure which is creative of the most enhancing values for the contiguous ramifications of the social group. Salvation from the greatest evil and to the attainment of the greatest good lies in that attitude of enduring and devoted search for this adjustment to the creative cosmic process, which attitude is conscious also of the need for intelligent action with regard to all the known and possible conditions of the situation.¹

Salvation is active intelligent devotion to the attainment of the ethical ideal. It is this sensitiveness to the fact of evil, deep desire to overcome or transmute it, all under the ethical drive of a search for the highest personal and social values which distinguishes the salvation message of this age from other modern quests for satisfaction. The actual personal experience to which the term "salvation" may be given, is that feeling of harmony, internally between the warring desires of one's nature, and externally with one's fellows and the environment, through having consecrated one's life to the determining influence of a supremely desirable ideal.

What is the state of salvation when so conceived? It is not a state of static peace, but one of dynamic adjustment to the constantly changing factors of the physical and social environment. It is a progressive development of the personal desires, responses, ideas, and ideals, so that one comes to face understandingly the play of circumstances upon life, and also comes to increasing control over the degrading influences of physically destructive and anti-social urges. Salvation is a feeling of well-being because

¹ Cf. Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Morals (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 8: "To be wholly alive depends upon a man's sense of being completely engaged with the world, with all his passions and all the faculties in rich harmonies with one another, and in deep rhythm with the nature of things."

one's way has been committed to the search for those satisfactions in life which are most enduring socially. When a man is saved, having established an effective relationship with the value-producing order in the universe, he has achieved a way of meeting the problems of life with a calm clarity of mind, and a will to understand and work for the best possible solution. He has come to a willingness to face life as it is, to accept the task of creating a better social order through intelligent devotion to and use of the best available means of attainment. He has achieved an ever increasing skill in mastering the physical and social factors of experience so as to come to an ever more effective adjustment with the process of interaction which produces the greatest values of life.

Such a state of salvation transforms the individual search of man for selfish ends into a social search for communal values. This is that devotion to an ideal which stabilizes and integrates the individual, while at the same time one becomes increasingly aware of maladjustments and disorder, which must be overcome if the most enduring communal satisfactions are to result. Being saved means that a man has been awakened to the possibilities of individual and social development which are inherent in the cultivation of the abilities of himself and other persons. The understanding of wider ranges of his environment leads to that controlled development and enrichment of personal powers which is counted as one of the highest goods. Salvation is the achievement of a personality which is intelligently active and ethically social.

Steps in the Reconstruction of the Salvation Message

The historic doctrine of salvation has insisted upon a loyal commitment to that technique of satisfying life's great desires, which was dictated by the content of that body of knowledge accepted in past days as divinely revealed and true. Our task in the reconstruction of the message of salvation is one of transferring this loyalty from an outmoded technique to a technique which makes use of the method of control and achievement indicated by that present body of knowledge made dependable and available through scientific method. This will involve; first, an indication of those characteristics of the historic message of salvation which were temporal patterns having no enduring value in themselves; second, the indication of the enduring convictions basic to the historic expressions of salvation; third, the indication of modern needs for life satisfactions; fourth, the indication of modern techniques and resources for such satisfactions; and fifth, the synthesis of the enduring desires and convictions of the his-

toric Christian message with the present needs, techniques, and resources, so that there will result a message of salvation which may appeal to and be verified by both the emotional and the rational factors of human nature.

1. Modification Necessary in the Historical Emphases of Salvation

When salvation is considered to be a progressive, intelligent devotion to God as that natural process of interaction creative of value, it is apparent that the historic expressions of salvation patterned upon an altogether different concept of God must be reinterpreted or abandoned. Such a readjustment of thought will involve the stripping off of those supernatural, anthropomorphic, political, and ecclesiastical formulations, which appeared necessary and effective for the sustenance of Christian hope and conduct in the pre-scientific attempts at the control of life. This will be the area of the most apparent and most difficult modification in the idea of salvation, for these patterns of belief and behavior have become so identified with the actual needs of life which are sought that they oftentimes have supplanted them in consciousness and have gathered to themselves the emotional content which belonged originally with the elemental desires of life.

(1) Supernatural Emphases

When God was thought to dwell in another order of existence, a spiritual realm far removed from natural life, it became necessary to develop a technique which would bridge the gulf and make the divine nature available to man. That this was done by a divine act has been the central meaning of the doctrine of the Incarnation. It was believed that the operation within human nature of a mysterious divine substance, the Grace of God, first made possible faith in this inexplicable Incarnation, identification with Christ, and a resulting transformation of human nature into divine. Thus the technique of salvation became one of unquestioning faith in and acceptance of the work of Christ, and the performance of church administered sacraments and divine services which would insure the continual operation of divine grace in the human heart.

The Church has rightly held these practices to be mysteries. For no rational or verified grounds could be shown for the use of

such acts to invoke divine favor.¹ The feeling of peace and completion resulted when the prescribed ritual was performed and this emotional satisfaction verified the technique. Thus there has been the valuing of ecstatic, emotional, mystical experiences which transcend the normal experiences of men and therefore evidence the operation of divine power within human nature. Through worship, much prayer, faithful use of the sacraments and ascetic practices men have overcome the drag of the earthly human nature and have secured that soul filling experience described as the presence of God. All of these practices and beliefs have undoubtedly given men a feeling of individual peace with God and the assurance of eternal blessedness, but the great evil which has oftentimes resulted has been the denial of the use of intelligence and human effort to gain such ends, and also the more serious denial of salvation as concerned with attempts to bring about conditions in actual life which would make possible the guarantee of even the barest needs of life for all the members of the social group.²

When God is considered to be an organic process present and observable in nature, the whole direction of the search for salvation is changed. The technique of the best adjustment to the process of integration creative of value, indicates the necessity of intelligent observation and experimentation to determine the nature, limits and extent of the process, and the required transformation of the individual and social group in order to conform to it and thus realize the values sought. Traditional religious practices, beliefs and feelings are inadequate to reveal the nature of that essential order in any of the varied and complex situations of life, which when realized will result in the highest possible communal good. Such an order can only be determined by careful, intelligent examination of the various factors and needs involved,

¹Cf. E. E. F. Descamps, Le Genie des Religions (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1930), chap. v. ,Religious phenomena bear the marks of a social evolution of primitive rites.

²The recent investigation by the Federal Council of Churches following a lynching in Shafer. North Dakota, disclosed complete public silence. The minister of the Presbyterian Church, in refusing to co-operate with the Federal Council, wrote, "The last several weeks in our gracious revival,--I have been laboring for the saving of lost souls, and my duties in this, His work, are so heavy and confining that I have not time, or adequate ability, I am afraid, to be any help." Quoted from The Christian Century, XLVIII (1931), 429.

an analysis of possible resources and experimental testing of the logically most socially productive plan of action.

The satisfaction gained from the communal good which has resulted from the use of the tentative plan of action gives the weight of conviction to the feeling that one has found the way to God, and one finds himself on the way to a religious experience of right relation to God. This is the experience of God in life, the assurance of which carries forward the adventure of the religious life.

(2) Anthropomorphic Emphases

The personalization of the object of supreme devotion has been an almost universal characteristic of religion. The social patterns of relationship to the head of the family, the group or the state, have been adopted as the formulas by which helpful contact with the deity could be established. In Christianity, God is personalized as Creator, loving heavenly Father, and Divine Sovereign. God is worshiped as one who hears, and in his wisdom answers, the petitions of his children-subjects. God is looked upon as a divine person who may be pleased with praise and adoration, whose anger may be placated by proper rites and attitudes, and whose favor and power is granted to obedient subjects. God may be talked to in prayer and may be urged to interfere in the operation of natural processes and grant aid to those who are well pleasing in His sight. Conversely the anger of God against the disobedient and disloyal sinner is to be feared more than death. Sins against the Holy Spirit are unforgivable and the vain use of the name of God is subject to wrath.

The expression of this anthropomorphic emphasis in political terms has had a measurable effect upon the "plan of salvation." Obedience and honor are due the Sovereign of the World. Mankind because of sinful carnal nature can never render either one of these perfectly and so is guilty before God and deserving of damnation and punishment. But God in His love has provided Jesus Christ through whose work men are redeemed. God as a Sovereign is not to be approached in the common fashion but through special rites of self-humiliation, divine glorification, and with the assistance of divinely constituted representatives.

The use of the Creator-sovereignty patterns for God has caused many of the serious problems of theology. There is the question of evil. How could the almighty and benevolent ruler of the universe allow unendurable pain and evil to be visited upon the ignorant and the innocent who gain no spiritual strengthening or

wisdom thereby and only suffer inhuman torture?¹ Why should famine, and earthquake, and war destroy the children of God? Why are people born to be damned to eternal punishment through no sin of their own or anyone else, but solely because God has already made up the elect? If God be the all-intelligent Creator of the universe, then why is there the tremendous waste of life, the presence of mal-adapted forms in geologic remains, and the host of pernicious and malignant biological forms today?

The consideration of such questions has consumed much of the strength of men and has made intelligence the foe of religious loyalty. The question as to the proper technique of relationship to God considered as personal has led to much divisive opinion and the breaking of the Christian group into warring sects. But the chief danger of the use of such an approach to God has been the readiness to shift the scene of salvation from difficult human adjustment in actual life to the questions of right relationship with a little known, exacting Determiner of Destiny. Righteousness has too easily meant rightness with the Lord of All rather than rightness with one's fellows. Another great evil akin to this has been the dependence upon God to do, in His own time and way, what He will. Man thus escapes the toil and responsibility involved in bringing to birth a new human society through intelligently directed activity.

However, when God is held to be that order of integration in nature which is creative of value, both the comforting and the troublesome effects of the use of an anthropomorphic pattern disappear. The pattern of personality, even ethically presented, is inadequate and misleading when one inquires as to the describable characteristics of the cosmic process of value-producing interaction. Like other natural processes this order of value has its principles of action and completion. The response of God as process is realized in the creation of value in those situations where men have committed themselves most fully to the requirements of these principles of action and completion. Instead of a type of conversation, prayer thus becomes a personal or group process of self-analysis, research as to resources for change and development, formulation of plans of action, experimental testing of

¹ A recent treatment of the Idea of God, The Problem of God (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), by the personalist E. S. Brightman, indicates that the personal problem of God is this dark side of the divine nature which God is seeking to resolve.

these plans, and self-dedication to the achievement of the ideal.¹

(3) Ecclesiastical Emphases

Every method for the creative control of the experiences of human life has relied upon those who were expert in the use of the established technique. In Christianity, the pattern of God as an invisible sovereign has made necessary the work of those, who because of special gifts, experiences, or training, were thought to know God intimately and favorably, and were thus able to invoke the divine favor and blessing upon the common and ignorant worshiper. Such blessings were only available to those who were in right relations to the divinely instituted church and its ordained leaders. For only the Church and its leaders had the right beliefs, the right techniques, and the right contacts by which salvation was possible.² The evils of such a dogmatic position are evident not only in the history of the Roman Catholic Church but also in that of the Protestant Churches. The Scriptures have been held to contain the plan of God for the salvation of men; but life-destroying confusion has resulted as to the proper interpretation of that plan. It was believed that God would certainly reveal it, either to those who were in a contactual succession of the ordained, or to those who had achieved a direct, personal experience of God. The church has split over the question of the proper channel for the flow of divine grace into the human heart.

When God is considered to be a natural process revealed by knowledge outside of the religious tradition, the importance of the Church as the peculiar and only avenue of salvation disappears. It can no longer bless or damn man for life or eternity, the minutiae of ritual are no longer worth fighting over, salvation lies

¹Cf. E. E. Aubrey's discussion of "Prayer as Adjustment" in Religion and the Next Generation (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), chap. vi. Godwin Watson speaks of prayer as "purification of desire" when in search of a great ideal. As such psychology has much help to offer. "What Does Psychology Do to Religion," Christian Century, XLVIII, 604-606.

²Cf. R. Rainy, The Ancient Catholic Church (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1902), pp. 521 ff. The flood of new proselytes indicated the need of legal principles and practices for their control. Obedience brought salvation. "The theory which this implied settled on men's minds like a fate. 'Christ has furnished us with a system of church ordinances which if reverently complied with, do mysteriously effect salvation.'"

not in the acceptance of statements of beliefs or ecclesiastical loyalties. The function of the church becomes that of establishing a fellowship, for the training of persons in the demands and techniques of the ethical ideal of an achieved abundant life for all men, and for mutual support in the practice of this ideal.

The knowledge concerning the possible communal good and the means of attaining it will come from those who are expert in the control of the ills and joys of life in the particular area in which the sought for good lies. These are the scientists who seek to find and describe accurately and in universal terms, the structure, properties, and relationships of given events. These are also the philosophers who draw from the body of verified knowledge those logical inferences as to the structure of the universe, and so indicate the probable avenues of search for more perfect controls for life. These are also the artists and technicians in every field who know intimately the needs of life and the methods of utilizing available resources for their satisfaction. Here are to be found also those great-souled lovers of humanity who sift all knowledge and achievement for possible values which will enrich the lives of all men and bring to pass that order of communal satisfaction which has been variously described as the Kingdom of Heaven, the City of God, the Great Society, the Beloved Community, and the World Fellowship. All these constitute the prophets and teachers of that way of salvation which consists in an intelligent adjustment to the process of nature and the satisfaction of the desires of life consistent with the order of communal happiness.

2. Enduring Convictions in the Salvation Message

The supernatural, anthropomorphic, and ecclesiastical emphases of historical salvation fall away with a new concept of God. They, nevertheless, had in them several points of insistence which constitute the enduring emphases in the Christian message of salvation.

- (1) Man's life can be much better. There is much evil and pain in the world which prevent the peace and fullness of life which man desires. This evil must be borne or overcome through some power or means which is not common or easily known.
- (2) There is a power in the universe to which right adjustment must be made if evil is to be overcome and the satisfactions of life are to be attained.
- (3) This power, in part, may be known, experienced and used by those who commit themselves fully, both to a search for it, and to the requirements of conduct

which are thus discovered.

- (4) This search and the formulation of the findings must be in accord with that body of knowledge concerning the universe which is accepted as accurate and dependable.
- (5) The greatest values of life are not to be achieved alone but are the result of self-commitment to the search for the good of the social group. They are group achievements under the direction of wise and devoted leaders.
- (6) The personal satisfactions of life which are validated as ethically religious are those which can be experienced as values by all members of the social group. Individual material satisfactions are discounted.
- (7) The new state of life when attained is far superior to the waste and evil of ordinary experience. It is indeed a supernatural, that is, an extraordinary, way of life, worthy of an all-consuming effort and loyalty.

It will be noted that these statements are similar to the classification of the central emphases of the doctrine of salvation previously indicated. For purposes of general application they have been stripped of the theological language with which the former were clothed. These convictions are basic to the Christian faith and are fundamentally important to any modern expression of Christianity which would have that vitality which is sought in religion.

3. Life Needs in the Modern World

Our study of the doctrine of salvation has indicated that the points of stress in original messages have centered about the experienced shortcomings and needs of life. What are the needs of life which are today denied satisfaction because of blocking circumstances? What are the modern equivalents of evil, sin, damnation, and hell? These are the areas of personal and social maladjustment for which salvation is greatly needed and with which religion must deal, if it has any contribution to make to modern life. These maladjustments rise from such complex causes and their resolution embraces such a wide organization of physical, social, and psychical factors that the historic salvation message of loyal relationship to a personal God as a remedy for all of life's ills becomes an insufficient ideal. Such an ideal of loyal commitment to God becomes socially effective only when God is conceived to be that process of integration which is productive of communal good; for such a

relationship involves an honest, careful appraisal of the actual difficulties of human life, and an intelligent use of available resources of method, materials, and ideals to correct the evils which are apparent.

The pressing personal and social problems in the many different areas of modern life have been set forth recently by those students of life who are keenly aware of the evils of destitution, oppression, suspicion, pain and fear, from which men are struggling to escape. These writers, either consciously or unconsciously, have presented contemporary messages of salvation, for they have described the evil and sin of the particular area of life with which they deal; they have indicated the impending doom and the resulting hell if present courses are persisted in; and they have indicated also the necessary readjustments, new loyalties and new techniques, if the peace and well-being of life are to be guaranteed.

These modern prophetic messages fall into two general groups, those which attempt a rather comprehensive survey of the ills of modern life and indicate general principles of action for their remedy; and those which are primarily concerned with the suffering and danger in one field of human affairs.¹

¹The books in the first group which have been both widely read and productive of much discussion include: Walter Lippmann, A Preface to Morals; Joseph Wood Krutch, The Modern Temper (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929); George Albert Coe, The Motives of Men (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1928); Halford E. Luccock, Jesus and the American Mind (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930); Ralph W. Sockman, Morals of Tomorrow (New York: Harper & Bros., 1931); and John Dewey, Individualism, Old and New (New York: Minton, Balch Co., 1930).

In the group of those more particular studies of modern evil and its correction are such significant books as A. E. Haydon, The Quest of the Ages (New York: Harper & Bros., 1931); John R. Oliver, Fear (a study in psychiatric readjustment) (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927); Paul Hutchinson, World Revolution and Religion (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930); Harry F. Ward, Which Way Religion? (New York: Macmillan Co., 1931); Norman Thomas, America's Way Out (New York: Macmillan Co., 1931); R. H. Tawney, Equality (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931); Kirby Page, National Defense (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1931); and Morris R. Cohen, Reason and Nature (a study of the possibilities of scientific knowledge and control in the varied fields of human relationships) (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1931).

The great evils of modern society which are indicated most frequently may be grouped in three general classes.

(1) The uncertainty of the physical needs of life.

Men who would work cannot find work. The return for labor is so precarious or so relatively meager that life is sustained only with difficulty. Graft, speculation, and militarism load on non-productive costs. Politically-secure lawlessness makes for insecurity of property and life. Dread of destitution, unnamed diseases, and death paralyze intelligent and adventurous action.

(2) A self-seeking suspicious individualism.

Every man, or group, or nation is thought to be out to get all that can be got by any means which can be defended as legal or necessary. "Personal liberty," class consciousness, and jingoistic nationalism are creative of misunderstanding, suspicion, fear, and hate. Because of lack of goodwill, communal interest, and mutual trust, men find it hard to enter into and carry through effectively such co-operative enterprises as marriage, industry, politics and international relations. Those who have a measure of security and joy find it difficult to jeopardize these in the changes looking to the interests of those less fortunate. Pure pursuits of science, philosophy, art, and religion (aesthetic or theological), too easily neglect the physical and ethical needs of the social order.

(3) The loss of significance and meaning in life.

Excess of freedom leads to stultification and disillusionment. Corporate power, impersonal industrialism, entrenched, organized crime, and machine-ridden politics belittle personal significance and lead to a sense of futility and a cynical toleration of evil. Scientific knowledge has undercut the old religious authorities which gave meaning and value to life. There is widespread readiness to believe anything which will give joy, peace, integration and significance to life. But too many quests have been vanishing dreams or bitter cheats. The question is not only who or what to believe but also how and why?

These are the areas of need in modern life which are driving men to all sorts of dreams and endeavors for their satisfaction. That object or method which renders the highest satisfactions of security and comfort becomes the sought-for end of life.

It is an object of devotion because of its power to create that security, significance, and satisfaction which seem to be basic human cravings. Such an object readily takes the place of the divine object who was held by the Christian message to perform such offices for dependent man.

But the writers noted above have also surveyed the various attempts at the realization of man's vital desires and have indicated the futile and destructive nature of some and the possible value of others. They all indicate that the compactness of this age makes suicidal any satisfaction which is not relative to the requirements of all other individuals or factors in contiguous relationships. There is need therefore of commitment to some most inclusive object or process which will yield the urgently needed communal good.

4. Modern Components of a Message of Salvation

What resources does the modern Christian group have which make possible any deliverance of the world-society from these great evils of life and the achievement of enduring satisfactions? As in past ages these components of the message of salvation are to be found both in the social heritage and in the contemporary experiences of control and power.

(1) An Ethical Principle of Action

Even the critics of Christianity have been ready to point out that the Christian group possessed in the life and teaching of Jesus a principle of ethical social behavior which if embodied in life would make more possible a Kingdom of God on earth. It has been maintained that this principle of ethical love has never been consistently and fearlessly used by any large group of the Christian Church, and that Christians should demonstrate the personal effectiveness of this message if they would commend it to the world.

When we seek to state the teaching of Jesus on any practice or belief we are met by the problem of determining just what he did believe and teach. His words have come to us through a literature written to gain adherents to the Christian cause. There are two general ways of approach to a reconstruction of his message. One is through a realization that Jesus was a Jew, evidently influenced by the ethical preaching of the Pharisee group. Thus an understanding of the teachings and hopes of the Jewish Pharisaical

group would give indications of Jesus' own thought.¹ The other method is through the critical examination of the Synoptic Gospels, either accepting that body of teaching common to all three gospels,² or more scientifically clearing away the amplifying results of worship, loyalty, expectation, and propaganda. Good scholarship makes use of both of these methods.³

Jesus was apparently not concerned with the metaphysical or mystical nature of God. To him, as to the Jews in general, God was Lord of the heaven and earth, the Creator and Ruler of the World, who is almighty and able to do anything, controlling the world in the most minute way, always near and requiring no intermediate agents in dealing with the world and in communicating with men. Jesus was characterized by an acute awareness of an intimate personal relationship with God, the Heavenly Father. He was concerned to present God as a loving, interested, and just Father who was seeking to win men to a life of obedience, moral perfection, and helpfulness.⁴

As a Jew. Jesus was influenced by the hopes of his people for deliverance from the rule of Rome, and restoration of the Jewish nation under theocratic rule. He apparently did not favor the nationalistic revolutionary method of winning this relief but set his hope upon a phase of the eschatology of his day, which held that "salvation was to come through the miraculous inauguration of a new day. There was imminent a day of judgment when God would effect deliverance for his people."⁵ Jesus described this new age as the Kingdom of God and called on men to repent of their unrighteous devotion to material and legalistic matters and enter upon lives of human helpfulness that they might prepare for the imminent day of judgment. "Membership in the Kingdom could be insured only on the basis of individual righteousness."⁶

Jesus did not preach a gospel of passive expectation of

¹ Cf. R. T. Herford, Judaism in the New Testament Period (London: The Lindsey Press, 1928), p. 187. This is also the approach of C. C. McCown, The Genesis of the Social Gospel (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929).

² The approach of A. C. McGiffert in The God of the Early Christians (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1924).

³ See S. J. Case in Jesus - A New Biography (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927).

⁴ See A. C. McGiffert, op. cit., pp. 3 ff.

⁵ S. J. Case, "The Rise of Christian Messianism," in Studies in Early Christianity, edited by S. J. Case (New York: The Century Company, 1928), p. 321.

⁶ S. J. Case, Jesus - A New Biography, p. 428

this miraculous event. The desired perfection of life was both a present moral righteousness and a soon-to-be-realized eternal blessedness with the Father. Men were to exemplify here the same manner of life which would characterize them in a new age; a life of purity, of active social righteousness and helpfulness, and of complete freedom from bondage to affairs of this world for an unhindered pursuit of the ideal life which was to be made fully possible in the imminent new age.¹ One of the great evils, concerning which Jesus apparently had much to say, was that age old economic evil of the hoarding up of wealth by the powerful, their oppression of the poor, and their refusal to share the goods of life with the unfortunate. In Jesus' view all men have a right to share the good things of life.² As men followed Jesus' own example of righteousness, forgiveness, helpfulness, and mutual consideration; and so became obedient to the will of God, they would become Sons of God, enter into direct fellowship with him, and thus gain acquittal at the judgment.³ Salvation was to be gained through a life of mutual service and fellowship with the children of God. Salvation was membership in a Kingdom of God. Seek the welfare of him who is in need as you would seek your own and thus live as a devoted son of a common Heavenly Father, and lo, you have realized the joys of the Kingdom.

Many of the reform movements in Christian history have been attempted returns to a Gospel Christianity. The failure of many such movements has been due to the very authority and respect with which Jesus and the Scriptures have been clothed. This has caused two religious evils; first, the literal acceptance of the words of Scripture as true and effective for all time; and, second, a reading of new meanings into the words and deeds of Jesus which the believer feels ought to be there because of the implicit nature of the perfect revelation of God. Thus literalism and idealization have limited the effectiveness of the Christian group in its consideration of the problems of actual life which have faced its members.

It is clear that there has been a principle of ethical conduct which had its source in Jesus, and which has been tremen-

¹Cf. ibid., pp. 385-441.

²Cf. C. C. McCown, op. cit., for a careful statement of the social message of Jesus. He indicates that we may not reasonably infer from Jesus' actual words what our specific action should be in any modern situation but that his principles of justice and righteousness do indicate our responsibilities (pp. 329-75).

³Cf. G. B. Stevens, The Christian Doctrine of Salvation (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1905), p. 115.

dously helpful in bringing about that measure of peace, comfort and happiness which does prevail. There is need, however, to realize the temporal limitations of Jesus' teaching and conduct. His thoughts were clothed in the language of the religious and cultural tradition of his race. He was concerned with social problems of a vastly different type of life. The words and deeds of Jesus, even if they could be exactly determined, are not now to be taken as an absolute standard for thought and practice. They constitute a widely influential theory of social behavior which is to be rejected, validated, or corrected by the test of actual use. Does there result an enduring experience of social good when the belief in personal values is put into use in modern society? Does an intelligent, energetic use of Jesus' mode of social relationship produce enlarging personal happiness and social integration? If so, then it is for this age a way of salvation. It then possesses meaning and value for the possible solution of persistent human problems, for it is apparent that one of the chief concerns of Jesus was with the age old problem caused by the glorification of economic interest by those in power, and a consequent neglect or denial of the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the greater mass of less fortunate persons.

(2) Scientific Method and Knowledge

When salvation is considered to be a state of right adjustment to that natural process, which is productive of good, it is evident that the technique of salvation becomes a method of accurately determining the elements, the structure, the possible relationships, and the resulting effects of any situation or activity. This is that technique of inquiry known as the scientific method. The scientific method of testing and reconstructing man's beliefs or ideas about things has given man dependable and usable information for the control of great areas of the physical aspects of life. This method is being increasingly applied to the existent ideas concerning the psychological and sociological areas of life with widening areas of security and control as a result. One may have convincing revelations, insights, theories or hunches as to that way of social behavior which will result in the most general satisfaction and the largest measure of continuing good, but not until these beliefs have been validated through intelligent experimentation are they to be considered as safely usable. Even then they are to be held as always subject to change in the light of new information and new situations.

"The prejudices and passions of men are to be softened, the kingdom of heaven brought in by the observation of facts, the use of reason, and the transformation of man and nature by the application of the principles which reason discovers."¹

This developing body of verified judgments, as to the most productive behavior in any particular area of life, constitutes one of the major resources in the search for the enduring satisfaction of life's needs. The growing realization that a great part of the anti-social behavior of individuals and groups is due to poor heritage, bad environment, insufficient food, ill health, social repression, unreasoned prejudice, etc., has given tremendous impetus to those who seek a scientific control of life. This has led to a new understanding of sin and evil on the part of religious groups and the consequent wide interest in medical missions, psychiatric clinics, nurseries, religious education, racial and industrial researches, etc.² A great measure of the salvation of the human family will depend upon the increasingly effective use of the technologies of the applied sciences.

However, it is to be noted that the use of the scientific method does not necessarily result in that personal and social order of adjustment which provides the greatest relief from evil and the most certain promise of good. The use of scientific method and knowledge does actually result in the manufacture and effective use of aerial bombs, mind-poisoning propaganda, life-killing machinery, and organized exploitation of economic, racial and international interests. This is that use of scientific method which produces immediate values for the group in power, but which disregards the needs for security and satisfaction of other impinging human groups. Such a use also disregards the actual inefficiency and waste of the immediate system and also the more serious ultimate suicide to which such practices lead in the closely knit organic society which now exists in the world. It is essential

¹F. S. C. Northrup, "Basic Assumptions of Science in Their Bearing upon Religion," Religious Education, XXIII (1928), 295. See also H. N. Wieman, The Issues of Life (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), pp. 18-28, for a detailed analysis of the steps in scientific method as applied particularly to religious and ethical problems.

²Cf. H. H. Titus, "The Christian Treatment of Sin in the Light of Recent Studies of Behavior" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1926).

that scientific method be freed from this group exploitation and thus be applied to the search for the widest and most enduring ranges of value in the personal and social areas of human life.

Such a search for the most fruitful process of human relationships is in the truest sense ethical and religious, for its results are not individually but socially good. The evil of social life results from the failure or refusal of men to extend their individual search for satisfaction to a search for the good of others. Modern sin is the hindering denial of the operations of the process of interaction which is productive of good. Sin is persistent maladjustment to God, so conceived. Salvation lies in the personal realization of such a maladjustment and the commitment of the self to the search for that order of social interaction which is productive of communal happiness.

(3) Social Institutions and Cultural Heritage

The institutions of society are the outgrowth of efforts to find and hold the greatest available comfort and security in life. They are the organization of life-interests and thus must be dealt with in any effort toward social salvation. As historical growths they now contain elements of both good and evil. They are thus not absolute and so are subject to change and reconstruction in the search for a greater security of life. They provide the instruments for the testing, rejection or conserving of such values as may arise in the intelligent search for ever greater social community.¹

The Christian Church as an institution has behind it much honor and much infamy; it has within it much nobleness and much ignorance, much love and much legality, but it stands as an organization of people built about the socially valuable convention of loyalty to an ethical God and a loving Savior. This heritage is an important constituent of any plan of salvation today, for in it lies the best expression of the search for the eternal values of life which our forefathers stated in the light of their knowledge and experience. The modern Church follows them best when it gives itself to the search for that process of life which will most surely yield the satisfactions for which

¹Cf. Lippmann, A Preface to Morals, chap. xiv. Marriage is presented as a practice school in which individual naive desires are transcended and there develops a mature and disinterested partnership with the world.

they sought and which, for lack of adequate natural control, they put forward into another realm of existence.

The Church thus becomes a school, a fellowship, and an instrument for the fostering and training of intelligent and ethical adventurers in the search for that wider area of communal satisfaction which has been called the Kingdom of God.¹ As a fellowship the church fosters and sustains that individual morale² which is necessary to the pursuit of high and difficult ends.

5. The Salvation Message of the Modern Church

The principal practical problem which is faced in this attempted reconstruction of the message of salvation is one of transferred loyalties. In the majority of the Christian Churches there is still a strong tradition of devotion to God as a Divine Father and Sovereign. How is it possible to put the strength of this loyalty and the drive of its convictions behind a technique of salvation which looks to the ethical satisfaction of the needs of life through intelligent commitment to the requirements of God, considered as that natural order of interaction which leads to the greatest possibilities of good? How can motivating fervor be aroused by a salvation message which proclaims the need for scientific knowledge and intelligence in determining the needs of men, the available resources, and possible techniques for satisfying these needs; which indicates the need for ethical and intel-

¹One of the best recent statements of the social responsibilities of the Christian Church is that of the World Service Commission of the Methodist Episcopal Church: "We must, as Christians, look with new and painstaking discrimination into the life of our church and into our own lives to see in what measure we are contributing to the perpetuation of injustice or hindering the progress of the reign of righteousness among men. . . . We must offer the spiritual heritage that is ours, not in any attempt to impose our ideas or our ways on others, but to share all that we have of vital worth with all . . . who, in every land, are setting out today toward new and lofty goals" (quoted in The Christian Century, XLVIII (1931), 36-37.

²The 1931 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church voted to put the full strength of the church organization back of those of its membership who might suffer because of anti-militaristic positions.

lectual self-discipline if communal satisfactions are to result; and which puts its emphasis upon a present rather than upon an eternal realization of security and happiness?

(1) Reconstructive Trends in Religious Thought

While the problem of setting the emotional drives of life behind the search for a saving relationship to God, as a value-creative process, is a difficult one, yet it is not altogether impossible. In fact there are many evidences within the Christian group of trends in that direction. These trends indicate the slow redefinition of religious ideas in terms more compatible with the social experience. This body of religious definition is the theology which gives the individual under its influence the set of mind or "run of attention" for the apprehension of new religious experiences. It also provides much of the language in which to describe these experiences, although new meanings from other socially accepted experiences are given to the theological terms in order to make them more universally understandable. Succeeding generations thus shape their grasp of religious objects under the influence of changed religious formulae, which are accepted unquestionably as authentic. What seems to be radical reconstruction to one generation is matter of fact to the next.¹

Following the advent of the theory of evolution men began to speak more easily of the laws of nature as the observable operation of the will of God. As it became evident that the theory of an outside Creator of the Universe could not be maintained against the advance of science, it became the fashion to speak of God as immanent, as the World-Ground. Religious leaders indicate that many are losing a sense of the reality of God. What is meant, is, that the traditional concept of God provides more problems than satisfactions in any attempt to meet the difficulties of life. The increasing reliance upon rational, scientific method in the attack upon these problems, has given men greater freedom from the strictures of emotionalized, anthropomorphic patterns of thought. It has provided increasing ease in, and more general use of abstract, critical, and logical methods of thought.² Men are more inclined

¹Cf. E. E. Aubrey, "The Need of Definition in Religious Experience," Journal of Philosophy, XXVII, 560-72.

²This is that "naturalization of intelligence" which John Dewey believes will bring to realization the greatest social good. Cf. The Quest for Certainty (New York: Minton Balch Co., 1929), chap. viii.

to ascribe physical and natural causes to events than to look for the presence of indwelling spirits or demons.

The gradual change in the use of the Christian Scriptures is to be noted as another factor which makes easier the transfer of loyalty from one concept of God to another. Modern biblical scholarship has indicated the social origin and development of the religious beliefs and practices which are found in the Scriptures.¹ The Bible is more generally regarded as a progressive account of how men, in various stages of culture and experience, thought and acted about life and God. Levels of religious understanding are recognized and the older practice of unquestioned acceptance of every word as directly revealed by God is followed by comparatively few. Conformity to the idea of God as presented in the Bible is no longer regarded as necessary to salvation. Even as the Hebrew prophets in every age proclaimed those new ethical and universal characteristics of Yahweh which could meet the religious needs of the current experience, so it is realized that men today should indicate the characteristics of God which will best meet the needs of this scientific age.

Another trend of Christian thought, which indicates the present groping after a salvation which may be humanly experienced, is the constantly increasing insistence that the chief task of religion is the correction of existing economic, social, racial, and international evils. There may be a future heavenly life but the chief concern is for such a type of life here and now. The causes of the experienced evil can be accurately described, and the measures for relief can be intelligently drawn up. Salvation from these evils is expected through human intelligence and effort. Divine power is evoked chiefly as a strengthener of morale. The loyal devotion of Christians to these practical social ends has been greatly strengthened through the preaching of the social gospel. As religious leaders, in search of effective measures for correcting existing evils, turned from transcendental theology to a re-examination of the message of Jesus, it seemed apparent that his emphasis was upon a human social order which would make possible an abundant life to every man. Modern problems were approached from the standpoint of the social teachings of Jesus. Much genuine good has been accomplished by the Christian group under this new impetus of loyalty to the ethical implications of the Savior's message. While it is true that individual salvation, that is,

¹ Cf. S. J. Case, The Social Origins of Christianity (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1923), chap. 1.

personal forgiveness by God and the assurance of heavenly immortality, has been distinguished from social salvation, and usually considered as having primary importance, nevertheless, the latter has been regarded by progressive communions as the necessary concomitant of the former. There is need for a new world here for all men, if the eternal world is to be realized by any.¹

(2) The Message of Personal Salvation

The current trends in religious thought noted above will help to validate the method of intelligent, ethical adjustment to the physical and social environment as the way of salvation offered by religion. A scientific use of the methods and materials of religious education has its great value here. But the assurance of having achieved a saving way of life will only be convincingly realized when the human desires, sought in traditional salvation, are satisfied. Does devoted and intelligent adjustment to the cosmic process of creative integration satisfy these elemental human hungers, which were guaranteed satisfaction by the historic message of salvation? That such satisfactions result from the use of this new technique of salvation can only be shown by the test of actual use. If such satisfaction results, then there will be aroused those basic convictions of actual fruitful relationship with that power in the universe creative of value. As was indicated previously, these enduring human convictions are the core of the Christian faith which has been clothed with the meaningful language of social experience. New patterns of thought will be needed to give the present realization of these age old needs and convictions that vividness and common-sense appeal which popular religion demands. Many of these patterns will undoubtedly continue to use personal and social metaphors because of their power of appeal to the religious attitude. Herein will lie the need for constant care lest the pattern be taken as an actual description, and self-commitment to the requirements of the actual and possible order of communal value be neglected.

Our analysis of salvation, as the search for the guarantee of human satisfactions, disclosed the following persistent human desires: security, peace with the divine power, personal significance, newness of life, and certainty of knowledge concerning the

¹Cf. H. F. Ward's insistence upon a socially ethical religion as the only means of saving civilization from self-destruction (Which Way Religion, pp. 72-113).

way of satisfaction. The orthodox theologian could guarantee an ultimate realization of these human desires, knowing quite well the mind of God through revelation, and also knowing by logical reasoning, what God as a perfect being ought to do. Frequent human failure to experience the promised blessings was laid to the ignorance or the perverseness of mankind. Thus the sovereignty of God and the certainty of salvation was saved.

This absolute certainty of conviction as to the outcome of man's efforts is no longer possible. Our knowledge of the world is now recognized to be dependent upon our range of observation and the bounds of logical inference. Such observation is temporal and contingent. New approaches to old problems may yield as yet undiscovered factors and thus great fields of knowledge may become subjected to reconstruction. Furthermore, scientific inquiry has not been able, as yet, to disclose one universal order controlling all of nature. Orders are present but so also is flux and disorder. Two recent students of scientific knowledge, Dewey and Cohen, coming at the problem from the background of widely different philosophies, conclude that man can not be absolutely certain about any belief; but that great measures of security, enough for the practical and necessary purposes of humanity, can be achieved. There is still need for the lesson of humility which the great religions stressed; that there are practical limits to man's knowledge and ability. There is still a place also for another great conviction of religion, that there are possibilities of life as yet unattained but which are worthy of man's supreme devotion.¹

Historic messages of salvation did not usually promise security of food, home or life in this world, although their missionary activities have often been accepted as such. The promise of such satisfactions was usually for a future life. Concerning the possibility of immortal life, scientific knowledge has no information. It remains still an unverified and persistent hope. But concerning this world it is now known that through the intelligent adjustment of the self to the environment, conforming to some elements, avoiding others, or transforming others; that practical security for the values of life can be achieved. The intelligent correction of existing social institutions, so that communal instead of individual satisfactions result, is now known to be possible. Security can be achieved by this modern technique of

¹Cf. Morris R. Cohen, "The Faith of a Logician" in Contemporary American Philosophy, ed. G. P. Adams and W.P. Montague (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930), I, 219-47; John Dewey, The Quest for Certainty, pp. 303 ff.

salvation, but it will require the loyal self-commitment of all men to bring it about.

The orthodox message of eternal damnation laid a fear of God upon men which has made peace with the Divine the most necessary end of life. The feelings of peace and joy in the human heart were accepted as signs that God had pardoned the sins and had admitted the sinner to the divine fellowship. While the unreasoning fear of an unchanging, unapproachable sovereign has passed with the present concept of God, there still remains the necessity of a sense of rapport or harmony with that power which makes possible the values of life. This feeling comes now when one commits his conduct of life to that method which is best confirmed by the scientific tests of experience. This method is the best available. A rigorous use of it brings that achievement of satisfactions which leads to the conviction that one is right in his adjustment to life.

Here also lies the possibility of achieving a sense of significance, of feeling that one's efforts and hopes are not futile and always subject to frustration. For by attempting to order one's life by things as they are, rather than by a dream of what they ought to be, there is established a verified base for the projection of ideals which are most probable of fulfillment. Man then works with those characteristics of cosmic power which have been scientifically described and links his life to the most dependable factors of the environment. He serves an ideal which is subject to constant re-expression as yet more knowledge comes to light. Here is that newness of life which historic salvation promised. Advancing knowledge has indeed added greatly to the enrichment of life for many. The problem is to have it do so for all men. Our knowledge of social controls has not been able to cope with the evil possibilities of every advance in physical science. But the scientific method of intelligent inference as to possibilities, and the practical testing of these theories, does provide the possibility of that new enrichment of life which is greatly desired.

Man's certainty as to the way of salvation lies no longer in the authority of divine revelation but in the authority of tested experience. The use of the scientific method in any given situation has resulted in both values and dis-values. The method is corrected to eliminate the dis-values. A practical certainty of conduct is thereafter achieved. Such a course of action is followed until additional events are discovered to be relevant, and a more productive course of action is shown to be possible. In the past the word, God, has been a symbol of this extra-human power available for the realization of the desires of life. Such

a use of the term, God, still stands when the necessary, extra-human power is held to be that process of interaction between human, non-human, actual and possible factors, which has been and still is creative of enduring value.

The assurance of personal salvation, which lies in a sense of right relationship to God, consists now in a realization of effective adjustment to that natural process of interaction which is productive of personal and social good. Due to human limitations this order of value is never fully known or actualized, but enough may be experienced to give direction and zest to the commitment of the self in the search for its ever greater realization. God is that unattainable ideal order of physical and social adjustment which when realized, even in part, is productive of satisfaction for the physical, social, and spiritual desires of man. Actual use of the principle of ethical human behavior stressed by Jesus, and embodied in life by the great souls of the Christian tradition, has indicated that it is a type of conduct which enters most fully into that process of interaction which is productive of the most inclusive and enduring social values.

